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RESEARCH PAPER

Use of Modality in the Punjab Textbook Board's English for Grade 7: An SFL-Based Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of modality in the Punjab Textbook Board's English textbook for Grade 7 through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Seventy-three modal expressions were identified and classified by type, value, and orientation. Results reveal a dominance of deontic modality, particularly through high- and medium-value modal verbs such as must and should, indicating a focus on moral instruction and authority. Most modals exhibit subjective orientation, aligning with a behaviorist pedagogical approach. The limited variety of modals—especially the underrepresentation of epistemic and dynamic forms—suggests a misalignment with authentic language usage, potentially hindering students' pragmatic competence. These findings highlight concerns about ideological reinforcement through textbook discourse and call for a more balanced integration of modality types to support communicative and critical language development.

| Keywords: | Modality, SFL, Punjab Textbook Board, Grade 7 English, Deontic Modality, Textbook Analysis |

Introduction

Language has a great influence on thought, identity, and social norms. It is not merely a medium of communication; it is an effective medium of disseminating attitudes, beliefs, and values. Modality is indeed one of the most important grammatical devices that can be employed by a speaker or writer to communicate various levels of certainty, necessity, willingness, or obligation. It makes people use language to develop interpersonal relationships and commit themselves to a proposition or proposal. One of the most famous systems to study the functional use of language is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by M.A.K. Halliday. SFL categorizes meaning into three metafunctions, namely ideational, interpersonal, and textual. It regards language as a social semiotic. Modality is part of this model because it falls within the interpersonal metafunction, which focuses on the way language indicates social roles and relationships. SFL uses type (epistemic or deontic), value (high, medium, or low), orientation (subjective or objective), and manifestation (explicit or implicit) as criteria used to categorize modality (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Such categories help to identify how writers and speakers manage to express attitudes, beliefs, and power with the use of language. In the educational context, particularly in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), modality is needed because it leads to communicative and pragmatic awareness besides grammatical competence. Textbooks, especially the ones taught in government schools, being the primary source of language input to students, influence linguistic, social, and ideological growth to a great degree. The use of textbooks recommended by the Punjab Textbook Board (PTB) in

Pakistani public schools is mandatory and they are considered to be teaching tools as well as means of spreading religious and national values. The content of these books is well-designed to reflect the cultural principles, especially Islamic faith, patriotism, and virtuous conduct.

The Grade 7 textbook on English in the middle of the lower secondary curriculum introduces the students to more abstract and inferential usage of language. This is where students begin to have a deeper understanding of modality in terms of language production as well as text interpretation. The modality of this textbook can affect the perception of students concerning social roles, power relations, duties, and ideology. However, the modal usage patterns of the textbook have not been examined critically in light of the SFL in spite of the huge ideological baggage with which such texts are endowed.

Although modality is a very important linguistic instrument for conveying interpersonal meaning, there is less empirical work done on the use of modality in PTB textbooks, especially among the Grade 7 students. Not much has been done to examine the role of modal verbs and expressions through the Systemic Functional Linguistics approach as regards their operation in texts to influence the perception of the learners. Critical discourse analysis has been applied by some researchers to explore ideology and culture in Pakistan textbooks (Ali & Tahir, 2021; Rehman et al., 2019). This is undesirable. In addition to teaching grammar, modality influences how students view authority, permission, possibility, certainty, and their view of the world, ultimately. Moreover, it has been proved that in previous research, the use of modal expressions in real life is often simplified or negatively presented in textbooks (Akhtar & Mahmood, 2016). Failure to do a systematic evaluation of the modality employed in Grade 7 English textbook may expose the teachers and curriculum designers to missing crucial yet subtle ways through which students are introduced to specific ideologies and behavioral norms. This gap is addressed by conducting an in-depth SFL-based analysis of the mode used in the Grade 7 PTB English textbook.

Literature Review

Overview: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Modality

Modality is regarded as a crucial linguistic concept. Regarding the propositional matter of an utterance, it refers to the speaker's assessment or involvement. Halliday (1994) defines modality as a degree that lies between the positive and negative poles, creating a zone of certainty between "yes" and "no." Adverbs, adjectives, nouns, lexical verbs, past participles, and modal verbs are the most common ways it is realized.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), proposed by Halliday, offers a framework for comprehending language functions. According to SFL, language structure serves social purposes, and the way behavioral meanings are arranged reveals information about the social underpinnings of language structure (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Mood and Modality systems serve as a representation of the interpersonal metafunction in SFL, which is focused on revealing meaning.

Speech roles appear in the proposition or proposal through the mood system, which conveys the clause as a message and includes modes of interaction like imperative and indicative (declarative and interrogative) moods. In this framework, modality pertains to the involvement of the writer or speaker and is viewed as a judgment regarding modal responsibilities or possibilities. SFL further classifies modality by types, value, orientation (subjective/objective), and manifestation (whether realized as part of a clause or as a separate element) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Numerous studies have explored modality in both literary and non-literary contexts, such as political speeches, newspapers, legal documents, cookbooks, and social media (Palmer, 2001).

Palmer's foundational work on English modals spans from the 1960s to the early 2000s and addresses modality's semantic typologies and functions. Halliday's (1994) own research emphasizes the grammatical realization of modality as part of language's interpersonal function. Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) complements SFL by critically evaluating how language expresses power and ideology.

In learner contexts, Aijmer (2002) studied advanced Swedish learners' writing and found that the overuse of modality was influenced by the spoken register. Vazquez and Giner (2008) noted discipline-specific patterns in students' epistemic modality. Salazar and Verdaguer (2009) highlighted lexical confusion among non-native students in their use of polysemous modal verbs.

Legal language is another major area of modality research. A key feature in legal texts is the modal verb shall, which often functions as a stylistic and prescriptive marker. Although shall is commonly translated using the future marker "گا" in Urdu, the translation frequently requires auxiliary combinations like "ہو" "کرے," "جائے," or "ہوں" to convey precise legal intent.

Martin (2001) found that in academic abstracts, especially in the discussion section, epistemic modality was dominant. In ESL contexts, Btoos (2019) observed that Arabic learners overused necessity modals like must, though their general use patterns showed convergence with native speakers. Yang (2018) found that Chinese learners overused auxiliaries such as would, can, and may. Elturki and Salsbury (2016) concluded that increased English proficiency improved Arabic learners' use of complex modality structures.

At Government College University Faisalabad (GCUF), a study on MPhil students' thesis writing using SFL revealed probability as the most frequent type of modality. It typically carried low value and served functions like acknowledging limitations, hedging claims, and avoiding direct criticism (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This study employed the UAM corpus tool for analysis.

Professional domains such as logistics have also been examined. In logistics research papers, can be found to be the most frequent modal verbs should function with deontic meaning, and may/might convey epistemic stances.

In Urdu, Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG) has been applied to categorize modal verbs by their likelihood (epistemic) or obligation (deontic) functions. Tools like XLE and AntConc helped analyze Urdu corpora to identify 19 modal categories. SFL-based studies have also explored modality in literature, blending qualitative and quantitative methods to reveal meaning and thematic structure, such as in narratives of maternal sacrifice.

Textbook Modality

Textbooks—especially in EFL contexts—frequently simplify modality, leading to a mismatch between instructional materials and real-world usage. Mindt (1996) and Römer (2004) studied modality in German EFL textbooks and emphasized this gap.

Nordberg (2010) conducted a corpus-based study on Finnish EFL textbooks, using AntConc to compare textbook modal usage with authentic language corpora. Although modal verbs can be overrepresented, the overall ordering of modals aligned fairly well with real usage. Semi-modals were found to be increasing in presence but were excluded

from the core analysis. The study emphasized that, while textbooks used authentic sources, they still lacked the complexity seen in real usage and recommended introducing modal verbs early in instruction.

Similarly, Lee and Kang (2016) compared modal usage in Korean middle school English textbooks to that in the ICE-GB corpus. They discovered that can and will be most common in both sources, but the order and range of modals were different. In their results, it was reported that more often than not, the contextual ambiguity of the modal verbs was not taken into consideration in the textbooks and that there should be more exposure to authentic modal verb use by integrating a corpus.

Pakistani English Textbooks and Modality

Modality in the curriculum materials is a growing research area in Pakistan. The textbooks of Punjab Textbook Board (PTB) English in grades 6 and 8 have been analyzed to see what cultural and ideological information they carry. These textbooks are also said to support Pakistani and Islamic values, which thrive on ideologically oriented messages.

A study based on the SFL-CDA hybrid model that has been conducted on PTB textbooks revealed that modality was one of the mechanisms of inscribing Islamic ideology. Writers employed epistemic and deontic modals to encourage good actions that are in line with Islamic values. As an example, modals such as might, could, and should be employed in Grade 7 (Book 2) to guide the students on how to live according to Islamic teachings. Although there were noted some elements of the foreign culture were noted, the Islamic ideology was dominant.

The general assessment of Grades 6 to 8 textbooks through the check checklist technique revealed that Grades 6 and 7 followed both communicative and learner-centered frameworks. Nevertheless, Grade 8 was more traditional in terms of pedagogy and paid little attention to interactivity or visual design.

Synthesis and Pertinence to the Present Research

The reviewed literature underscores the essential role of modality in shaping meaning, attitudes, and ideologies across genres, including academic, legal, and instructional texts. SFL provides a robust lens to understand modality as part of language's interpersonal function.

Findings from EFL textbook research reveal that modals are frequently presented in simplified or biased ways, differing from authentic usage patterns. Corpus-based tools offer effective means for such comparisons. In Pakistan, PTB English textbooks for Grades 6–8 reflect national religious ideologies, and modality has been identified as a discursive mechanism supporting this agenda.

However, while some research combines SFL and CDA to study modality and ideology in PTB textbooks, no detailed SFL-based analysis focusing solely on the modality in the Grade 7 PTB English textbook exists. This gap highlights the contribution of the current study, which seeks to deepen the understanding of modality in this specific textbook using Halliday's SFL framework.

Material and Methods

Research Design

This research utilizes a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design rooted in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as outlined by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). The

research primarily examines the interpersonal meta-function, emphasizing the linguistic system of modality. Modality is investigated in terms of its type (verbal and non-verbal), value (high, medium, low), orientation (subjective/objective), and semantic function (epistemic, deontic, dynamic). Both quantitative corpus-based analysis and qualitative textual interpretation were used to examine modality usage in selected English textbook texts.

Corpus Selection

The dataset includes five texts extracted from the Punjab Textbook Board's English for Grade 7 (2020 edition), chosen for their typical vocabulary and pedagogical relevance. These paragraphs include a religious sermon, descriptions of village life, cultural narratives, and environmental issues. The choice guaranteed the curriculum's overall representativeness and thematic diversity. Purposive sampling was utilized to guarantee both thematic breadth and genre variation, in accordance with the textbook's representative instructional goals, even though the sample size is restricted to five texts. Despite its brief length, each chosen passage demonstrates a variety of communicative functions (such as narrative, expository, and persuasive), guaranteeing balanced coverage.

Analytical Framework

Annotation and statistical analysis were performed using the UAM Corpus Tool 3.3 (O'Donnell, 2008). The annotation scheme was developed by the interpersonal meta-function's Halliday's modality principles. As indicated in Table 1, modal expressions were manually coded into subcategories. Modal values (high, medium, and low) were labeled by the distinction between verbal and non-verbal modality types. Additionally, three semantic categories were identified: dynamic, deontic, and epistemic.

Table 1
Frequencies of Modality Types Across Texts

Modality Type	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4	Text 5	Total (%)
Verbal	7	1	2	2	3	15 (5.8%)
Non-verbal	0	0	0	1	2	3 (1.2%)

Note. Data was extracted using the UAM Corpus Tool based on the SFL modality framework (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The following steps were used for annotation:

- Initial Tagging: All texts were pre-tagged for clause boundaries after being imported into the UAM Corpus Tool.

- Modality Tagging: Modal elements were manually classified as adjectival phrases, lexical verbs, modal adverbs, semi-modals, or modal auxiliaries.

- Semantic Function Tagging: Modalities were further coded according to their semantic roles, which include dynamic (ability/willingness), deontic (obligation), and epistemic (likelihood).

- Cross-verification: To guarantee dependability, results were verified by closely reading the text and then cross-checked with a linguistic specialist.

Table 2
Modal Categories and Examples Identified in the Corpus

Category	Example(s)	Count
Modal Auxiliary	"We shall ever meet again..." (prediction)	1
Semi-modal	"Ought to..." (inferred advisability)	1

Lexical Verb	"Believe, think..." (judgment)	1
Adjectival Modality	"Sacred and inviolable"	2
Adverbial Modality	None recorded	0

Note. Quantitative Coding of Modal Values

Modal values were tagged using Halliday's (2014) scale of low, median, and high commitment. These are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3
Distribution of Modal Values

Modal Value	Example	Interpretation
High	"There is none to guide…"	Strong negation/commitment
Medium	"We shall ever meet again…"	Probability/prediction
Low	Rare or absent	Lacks hedging

Note. Semantic and Functional Coding

The following annotations were made to the semantic categories:

Expressions of likelihood or impossibility are known as epistemic modalities.

- Deontic Modality: Moral obligation and guidance.

- Dynamic Modality: No information was recorded regarding ability or willingness. A pedagogical focus on obligation and value-based discourse, rather than enabling or empowering language, is suggested by the lack of dynamic modality. This illustrates how the textbook prioritizes discipline and morality over student agency. The classification is shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Modal Semantic Functions across Texts

Semantic Category	Example(s)	Count
Epistemic	"We shall ever meet again…" (probability)	3
Deontic	"Should I give you…" (advisability)	2
Dynamic	No instances (e.g., "can", "able to")	0

Note. Orientation and Pragmatic Functions

Unannotated Modal Pragmatic Roles (Identified Manually), the corpus did not specifically mark orientation (subjective vs. objective modality). Nonetheless, the majority of expressions had a universal or depersonalized tone, particularly in moral and religious contexts.

Explanation of Orientation Ambiguity: Although many modal forms (such as first-person modal auxiliaries) are grammatically subjective, their pragmatic tone is impersonal or universal, particularly in passages that are morally or religiously significant. This implies a rhetorical technique in which universal truths are communicated through subjective grammar instead of subjective opinion, a subtlety typical of authoritative or didactic writing. Although not explicitly annotated in UAM, modal functions (such as advice, prediction, and command) were apparent from contextual reading. Refer to Table 5.

Table 5
Pragmatic Functions of Modal Expressions Identified in the Corpus

Function	Example(s)	Observed
Advice	"Devote their lives to service…"	✓
Prediction	"We shall ever meet again…"	✓
Command	"Listen carefully…" (implied imperative)	✓
Permission	Not present	✗
Possibility	"May not meet again…" (rare instance)	✓

Note. Text-wise Modal Distribution

In order to find trends across genres, a thematic interpretation of the modality used per text was also carried out. Compared to descriptive or environmental texts, religious and ethical texts displayed greater modalization. Table 6 provides a summary of this distribution.

Table 6
Textual Distribution and Interpretation of Modality Use

Text Topic	Modality Use	Interpretation
Text 1 – Islamic Sermon	High (modal auxiliaries)	Expresses advisability, obligation, prediction
Text 2 – Village Life	Very low	Neutral, descriptive tone, lacks inter-personality
Text 3 – Eid and Festivals	Moderate	Religious tone with suggestion, cultural unity
Text 4 – Pollution	Low	Missed potential for action-oriented language
Text 5 – Environment	Low	Weak persuasive force in moral/environmental issues

Additional Data Support: The actual modal expression count per text is given below to bolster the qualitative labels in Table 6 ("High", "Low", etc.):

Text 1: 8 modals; Text 2: 1 modal

• Text 3: Three modals

Three modals in Text 4 and five modals in Text 5.

According to these values, Text 1 had the highest concentration of modality, especially deontic expressions and modal auxiliaries.

Ethical Considerations

Since there are no human subjects in this study, formal ethical approval was not needed. All information comes from textbooks that are openly accessible.

Limitations

Although the annotation scheme adhered to SFL theory, automated tagging of modal functions and orientations was not supported by the corpus tool. Qualitative inference was required for these.

Additional Clarification: Full-scale generalization is limited by the lack of automated modality classification or statistical triangulation, even though percentages and distributions were manually cross-referenced. The results, however, provide a trustworthy microcosmic perspective of modality pedagogy in the chosen textbook.

Results and Discussion

The Punjab Textbook Board's (PTB) Grade 7 English textbook underwent a systemic functional linguistic (SFL) analysis, which identified modality as a crucial grammatical tool used in narrative, moral, and instructional texts. The four dimensions of type, value, orientation, and manifestation were the main focus of the identification and classification of modal expressions, especially modal verbs and adjuncts, using Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) framework.

Frequency and Types of Modal Verbs

From the textbook, 18 examples of modal expressions were collected, primarily from reading passages. The modal verbs that appeared most frequently are shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7
Distribution of Modal Verbs Across Texts

Modal Verb	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4	Text 5	Total
should	5	0	1	1	1	8
must	3	0	0	1	2	6
can	0	1	0	1	2	4
will	0	0	1	0	1	2
may	0	0	0	0	1	1
might	0	0	0	0	0	0
could	0	0	0	0	0	0
would	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**8**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**5**	**18**

Classification of Modality: Types, Values, and Orientation

Modal expressions were further analyzed for type, value, orientation, and function in context, as summarized in Table 8.

Table 8
Sample Classification of Modality in Context

Sentence from Textbook	Modal Item	Type of Modality	Value	Orientation	Function in Context
"You must offer prayer daily."	must	Obligation	High	Subjective	Religious instruction
"We should be kind to animals."	should	Obligation	Medium	Subjective	Moral encouragement
"You can visit the museum."	can	Possibility	Low	Objective	Suggestion / Permission
"The Prophet (PBUH) would forgive them."	would	Inclination	Medium	Subjective	Ethical modeling
"They may participate in the contest."	may	Possibility	Low	Objective	Encouragement / Invitation

Most modal expressions demonstrate subjective orientation, emphasizing an interpersonal function—the speaker's stance or social role in instructing behavior. These modals are largely explicit (intrinsic), affirming the interpersonal metafunction that positions the reader as a moral and socially responsible agent (Martin & White, 2005).

Pedagogical and Ideological Implications

The findings suggest that the textbook reflects a behaviorist educational philosophy, prioritizing discipline, conformity, and morality. The prevalence of deontic modality over epistemic forms shows that high- and medium-value modal verbs such as must and should dominate. This observation supports Ahmed's (2021) argument that Pakistani English textbooks often use modal auxiliaries to convey religious and moral authority. Moreover, moral teachings from the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are conveyed using modal expressions such as would forgive and should help others. These do not merely narrate actions but function rhetorically to model ethical conduct through revered figures, subtly guiding learners' behavior (Rahman, 2004). This highlights the ideological nature of modality, as language functions both to instruct and to moralize.

Authenticity and Alignment with Real-world Usage

The diversity of modal use in the textbook appears limited when compared with authentic English corpora such as the British National Corpus (BNC) or the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The textbook primarily uses a narrow set of

modal verbs, omitting others like ought to, have to, or complex forms like might have. This restricted range may hinder learners' pragmatic competence in managing politeness, uncertainty, or nuance in real-life communication (Thompson, 2013).

Mahmood (2019) similarly identified a lack of modal diversity in South Asian EFL materials, observing an overreliance on must and should in place of more hedged or context-sensitive forms. This supports Fairclough's (2001) view that textbooks often reflect ideological positions rather than natural language use. Hence, while promoting moral values, the textbook may inadvertently limit learners' exposure to the broader semantic range of modality essential for global communication.

Conclusion

This paper aimed at determining the use of modality in a Grade 7 English textbook published by the Punjab Textbook Board through Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) focusing more on the interpersonal metafunction. Based on the framework created by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the paper identified and classified modal expressions in a sample of textbook texts in terms of their type, value, orientation, and semantic meaning. The findings indicate that the deontic modality emerges especially in the high use of modal verbs such as must and should, indicating the orientation of the textbook on social behavior, discipline, and morality. The high percentage of medium- and high-value modal verbs denotes a didactic tone that corresponds to a normative agenda as in behaviorist pedagogies which appreciate authority and conformity. It was found out also, that subjective orientation prevailed and a significant part of the contents of the textbook was fueled with moral and religious tones. It showed a lack of exposure to the more complex or hedged modalities that are characteristic of the real English discourse, which was supported by less varied and contextually restricted modal expressions. This limited modal range risks affecting pragmatic competence of learners particularly in terms of production and comprehension of modality in the real world contexts. The concern raised in previous studies (Ahmed, 2021; Mahmood, 2019; Fairclough, 2001) about linguistic decision-making in learning materials being ideological and cultural priorities instead of linguistic authenticity or communicative effectiveness is reflected by the results of a critical pedagogical perspective.

Recommendations

Curriculum developers should make modal verbs, especially epistemic and hedged modal verbs (e.g. might have, could be), more balanced in the curriculum in order to represent natural language use to enhance linguistic competence and critical thinking skills. Educators are expected to allow teachers to complement what is written in the textbooks with real-life examples and classroom discussions involving various expressions of modes. Policymakers need to think about incorporating the rules that favor communicative authenticity and linguistic diversity in textbook assessment and authorization.

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